

THE FORT HOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE NEWSLETTER

July 21, 2011



**"THE GREAT PLACE"
"THE FUTURE OF THE ARMY BEGINS
AT FORT HOOD"
JULY 2011**

Is Customer Service Going Extinct?

When I am out visiting various retail stores, businesses, and other service-based locations, both on Fort Hood and around the Killeen area, I find myself sub-consciously evaluating the customer service staff. Since customer service is my business, I know how hard it can be at times to be pleasant and knowledgeable at all times. That doesn't mean it's impossible.

My customer service experiences vary from some pretty good experiences to some pretty awful ones. When the customer (me) feels like they know more than the representative, there's a problem. When the customer (me again) feels belittled and as valuable as dirt for disrupting the representative's day and asking inane questions, there's a problem. However, when the customer (again, me) calls with what appears to be a sticky issue and it's resolved quickly, accurately and with a smile, that's a good thing.

Here are some tips that have may prove useful as a customer service professional:

SMILE: You may think that smiling is overrated, especially if you are on the phone or doing a live chat with a customer. But when you smile, it comes through in your voice and in your words on the screen. By smiling as you converse with the customer, you are increasing the chances that they will smile back (literally, or figuratively). The whole tone of the conversation can change—just with a simple smile.

LISTEN: Some people just need a place to vent about their issue. Deep down, they know that there's nothing you can do to immediately resolve whatever their issue is. But to have someone patiently listen to them go through the whole thing can be a huge relief. Listening – not just waiting for them to wind down – can be a calming action and the customer may be much more

willing to listen to you share what you can do to help.

GO THE EXTRA MILE: Some issues can't be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Unfortunately, that's true. However, sometimes compromises can be made and customers can leave satisfied, if not completely happy. As you smile and listen to the customer, find clues in what they are saying that can help you help them. Grab a manager (if you're not the boss) who can bend a little bit for them and find a happy medium. Maybe it's not the 100% refund they wanted when they walked in the door, but the store credit might satisfy them and they'll leave knowing that you cared enough about their issue to do what it took to find a resolution.

While these principles are used mostly in brick-and-mortar stores or large corporations, you can apply these to small businesses
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where you might be the owner, customer service rep, and janitor – a lot of hats to be sure! These principles can be applied in any situation where you are speaking with someone who is unhappy with something that they feel you have control over.

And, when you are the customer in question, remember to smile and listen as well. 😊

How to diffuse potentially difficult customer service situations.....

Showing empathy to customers takes more than words, it also takes imagination.

It's not enough to utter a few well meant clichés, hoping this will placate an upset or angry customer. People working in customer service need to make the mental stretch and try to imagine what it is like to travel in the customer's shoes.

When a customer is aggrieved or has had a negative experience, the most important thing for them is to feel that their point of view has been heard and understood.

The worst thing that can be done is to fob the customer off with a few pat expressions, or not take their grievance seriously at all.

Even if all the right things are being said, a poor tone of voice can result in poor customer Service. Therefore it's important that the customer can feel genuine sympathy when they

speak to a customer service representative.

The customer might not always be right. Indeed, sometimes the customer may be very much in the wrong. For example, a missed payment on a credit card may have put an account into arrears, resulting in a declined purchase at a busy store. An embarrassing situation is the unhappy result.

Suddenly the customer calls in a rage, feeling humiliated. The job here is not to tell the customer that they are to blame for having missed making the payment on time, but to try to understand their emotions and respond to them.

Often in this situation, where a late payment on an account has resulted in credit being abruptly cut off, the customer can feel belittled and reduced. These feelings need to be addressed, allowing the customer to feel like they have been heard and their negative experience is understood.

It takes character on the part of the service provider to keep calm when confronted with an angry customer. The very human response is to be defensive, and return aggression with aggression. Employees need to be trained to control their emotions, to take a step back, breathe deeply, and let the unhappy customer get everything off his or her chest.

The three main points to remember when serving an angry or upset customer are:

- Listen quietly and carefully to their complaints, without interrupting.

- Remain polite and respectful, no matter how hostile the customer becomes.

- Maintain a sympathetic and even tone of voice. Never raise your voice.

In most circumstances, a customer who is rude but only receives civility and understanding in return, will find it difficult to keep up his or her aggressive behavior. It's hard not to feel ill-mannered when you are continually being treated decently and with respect.

Empathy Statements for Customer Service Representatives

The following are helpful empathy statements that can be used to diffuse potentially explosive customer service situations.

"We always appreciate customers who take the time to give us their feedback. I'll pass what you've said onto our management team."

"Thanks for alerting us to the bad service you have received. What can I do to help fix the situation?"

"I'm sorry you've had such a bad experience. I'd like to try and help."

"I can completely understand. If that happened to me I'd be really upset too. I can imagine how frustrating that must be."

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"What's happened to you is unacceptable and against company policy. Let me consult a supervisor to see if there is anything extra we can do to help."

"It's perfectly understandable that you're very upset about what's happened."

"The same thing happened to me only recently, so I can see why you're angry. It's a terrible inconvenience. Let me try and see what I can do to rectify the problem."

"We don't like to see our customers upset and inconvenienced. We always strive to create a positive customer experience."

Working with angry or upset customers requires a high sensitivity to other people's feelings, even when the customer is in the wrong. By not taking abuse personally, taking a step back mentally, and striving to understand why a customer feels humiliated or wronged, a dissatisfied customer can be turned into a satisfied one.

Source:

www.customerservicemanager.com,

Author: Chris Saliba



"Ok, how about this motto: 'If you are unhappy for any reason, we will feel really bad'."

Twelve Tips for a Positive Customer Service Experience.

It has been said that positive customer service has the following characteristics: it is a surprise to the customer, it is greater than the customer's expectation, it is whimsical and so superb that it generates a positive buzz among other customers - and their friends.

From this we can learn that treating customers well depends upon seeing them as people who always deserve your respect, assistance and gratitude.

What are some strategies your employees can take to create a positive experience for customers?

Here are some tips:

1. Maintain a positive attitude. This is the most important element in delivering a positive experience to your customers. Appear eager to solve their concern. Take a long-term viewpoint of the importance of maintaining a relationship with each customer. Such goodwill will produce repeat business
2. Actively listen to the customer's needs/concerns/frustrations. Verify and clarify what you are hearing from your customer before you begin to act. Nothing is more frustrating to the customer than having to repeat his/herself because the employee is not listening OR because you are stalling for time.
4. Be honest and clear in your communications. Admit when



Your company has caused the problem and provide unwelcome information directly, kindly and in positive terms when needed.

5. Acknowledge the customer's frustrations. When your company caused the problem, remember not to criticize the company!
 6. Look for solutions which allow a win-win solution. Don't blame customers for their mistakes - sometimes we as customers get it wrong.
 7. Confirm that the solution is agreed by the customer and the organization's objectives for customer service.
 8. Resolve the problem. Do what you said you were going to do, keep the customer informed and follow-up with the customer to confirm satisfaction.
 9. Go one step beyond what your customer expects.
 10. Always thank customers. Treat them as valued partners in your organization's ability to achieve its strategic objectives.
 11. Provide the basic principles of service. My favorite office supply company always welcomes me when I walk through their doors. The greeting is always upbeat and excited - making me feel
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welcomed.

12. Ensure all employees (customer facing and non-customer facing) understand the organization's objectives and values concerning customers.

Some Additional Thoughts for Improving Customer Service

Know your customers and go beyond their expectations... make them say "WOW!"

Be passionate about customer relationships.

Remember that only extremely satisfied customers are genuinely loyal; don't assume that repeat customers are loyal customers.

Your positive attitude toward your customers does not mean that the relationship is mutual (you could be the only game in town... today).

Customers who feel appreciated, respected, valued and recognized are loyal because they have an emotional connection to your company.

Only use technology which supports the customer relationship.

Hire the best of those who can become the best - train and develop them and do everything to keep them in the team.



Offer services which are above the norm within your industry.

When mistakes happen, treat them as opportunities. Experience your own business as your customers do (Have you seen Undercover Boss?).

You are probably less customer focused than you think (check all levels of customer interfaces).

Pay attention to the little things - anticipate your customer's needs before they become aware of them. If you listen closely, your customers will tell you how to impress them.

Customer satisfaction is worthless... Customer Loyalty is Priceless.

Good customer relationships arise from your culture... not your programs or initiatives. For example, how you treat your employees is an indicator of how you treat your customers. Hmmm!

A customer focused strategy should develop a relationship with customers which nurtures commitment and cultivates a long-lasting loyalty (both ways). It can be viewed as an attitude which relies upon genuine and expressed respect for the customer. It is an extension of your brand instilling trust, confidence and reliability.

Source:

www.customerservicemanager.com,

Author: Dr. Stephanie Parson

"Big Mouth" Customer Service.

Word of mouth is now the name of the customer service game....

One of the fundamental building blocks of a successful business is repeat business and referrals. In order for our business to not only survive but thrive, we have to ensure that our clients and customers are totally 'in love' with what we do for them, so much so that they tell everyone they know!

People are big mouths, and I don't mean that in a derogatory sense. Think about it: if a regular business frequently does something over-the-top for us and we're tickled pink about it, we're going to brag about it to everyone we know.

Conversely, if a business does something that makes us feel wronged or taken advantage of, well, we're going to do the same thing, aren't we? We're going to tell everyone we know.

These scenarios are potentially going to affect that business either in a beneficial or a detrimental way - because what we say to others is going to be shared. The people we tell are surely at some point going to relay the information (good or bad) to other people whenever that particular business name comes up.

Furthermore, it's not like it will dwindle out in a week or two. Oh, no. Five years from now someone is going to relay the same story... albeit altered by time (and let's not forget how stories morph as they get 'whispered down the lane').

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So whatever business we're in, we absolutely want to provide exceptional customer service so the stories that are being told by our 'big mouth' clients are the good ones!

And since these customers already adore us, why not get their endorsements in writing? Ask them to write a letter, in their own words, about how our business has helped them or why they enjoy working with us. Then utilize this letter (and all others like it) in our promotional efforts - our website, blog, Facebook page, brochures, etc.

It's proven that prospects find this type of information to be more valuable in decision-making than any marketing material we may write ourselves - so capitalize on it!

On the flip side to this coin, we also have to figure out which are those folks who left... and ask them why. People leave because of bad service or indifference - these things can (and better) be fixed! Yes, it may be uncomfortable to call up Mr. Jones to inquire why he no longer uses us and horrifying having to hear his reasoning.

However, whatever the cause given by the customer, it's an opportunity for us to remedy it! It's a spectacular chance to make improvements we didn't even know we had to make, to raise the bar, and to help our business stand out from the crowd. So we need to embrace this constructive criticism and then thank our customer and tell him the steps we're going to take to fix the problem.

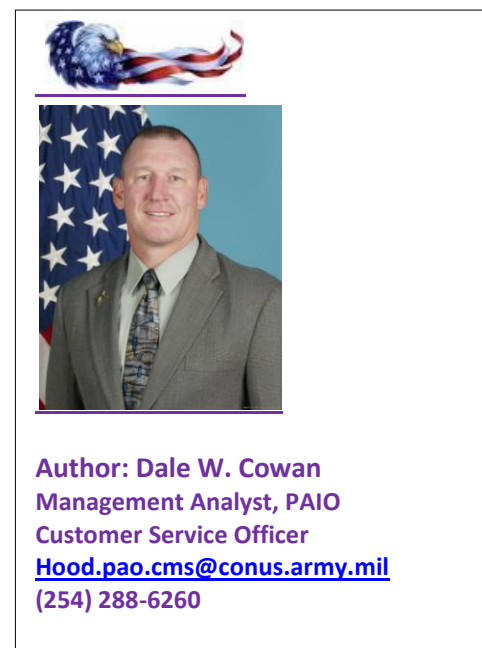
Even if we have to call him back in a week to share the solutions we came up with, won't Mr. Jones be thrilled? And then won't he 'big mouth' about it to his buddies? You bet 'cha!

We need to go forward with our business endeavors believing that every single thing we do has the potential to reach a multitude of people and be talked about for years to come.

Source:

www.customerservicemanager.com,

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